Lancet, "I cannot get it out of my mind. Nor do I wish to."

Sir Percy Selwyn Selwyn-Clarke KBE, CMG, MC, MD, FRCP, DPH, DTM&H, CStJ Barrister at Law died in Hampstead on 13 March 1976, leaving his body to St Bartholomew's Hospital for research. The nation can seldom have produced so unconventional a recipient of so many conventional honours. That "mulish obstinacy" had kicked up clouds of dust in Whitehall, and he was proud of it. We too have our Schweitzers, if only we care to honour them.

I acknowledge essential help with this article from Sir Percy Selwyn-Clarke's daughter, Mary Seed; Mrs Margaret Sloss; Mr and Mrs C R Boxer; and Dr Charles Fletcher.

Raising the dead: war, reparation, and the politics of memory

Derek Summerfield

All societies attach a different range of meanings to war than to natural disasters, and questions of societal recognition, reparation, and justice are generally central. Most modern conflict has been grounded in the use of terror to control and silence whole populations. Those abusing power typically refuse to acknowledge their dead victims, as if they had never existed and were mere wraiths in the memories of those left behind. This denial, and the impunity of those who maintain it, must be challenged if survivors are to make sense of their losses and the social fabric is to mend. For the names and fate of the dead to be properly lodged in the public record of their times also illuminates the costs that may flow from the philosophies and practices of the Western led world order, ones which health workers should be in a position to influence.

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In 1989 I documented the experiences of Nicaraguan rural peasants at the hands of Contra guerrillas sponsored by the United States. All had survived horrific attacks and been driven from their homes as destitute refugees.[1] Juana Jiron Romero told me of the night in March 1987 when Contras had attacked her remote hamlet of Quisilali and murdered several members of her family in front of her eyes. One of them was her 2 year old daughter, Liset, and Juana said that even two years later she still seemed to hear Liset's voice pleading with her for water as she slowly died. Standing in her almost bare shack she said, "I now have nothing of hers. . . . How can I show that she lived?" Then she said that shortly before the attack some foreign travellers passing through by chance had taken a photograph of her family. Somewhere abroad, she said, there was proof that Liset had existed.

POPPERFOTO/REUTER

Supporters and relatives of Korean women used as sexual slaves ("comfort girls") by Japanese forces in the second world war protesting as a result of Japan's persistent refusal to acknowledge and apologise for its war crimes

Bearing public witness

I remembered Liset when in July 1991, the 75th anniversary of the battle of the Somme, I saw an interview with a veteran who described a war memory that had troubled him for nearly seven decades. He had been in no man's land when shrapnel had critically wounded his friend, and it became clear to both of them that there was nothing for him to do but to crawl back alone. No one else had witnessed the incident and nothing was ever found of the wounded soldier. The veteran said that it was only in 1984, when he revisited France for the first time and saw his friend's name on a memorial stone, that he had felt at peace. I think he meant that what his friend had paid was now not just a private memory—knowledge of which he was sole custodian—but official and public. Similarly, after 1945 survivors of Nazi concentration camps searched for evidence of their vanished family members. These searches, some of which lasted years, seem to me to have been driven as much by a wish for concrete proof that the family members had existed as by hopes of finding them alive.

In London I have Iraqi Kurdish patients who believe that their duty is to speak for and represent the 200 000 Kurds who have "disappeared" at the hands of the Saddam Hussein regime, a duty more urgent because of what they see as a general indifference to their fate. In El Salvador people are worried that they have not recorded all the names of the 60 000 murdered by the army during the 1980s. In Mozambique fleeing survivors of grotesque brutalities inflicted by Renamo guerrillas sponsored by South Africa in the 1980s are haunted by the spirits of their dead relatives, for whom the traditionally prescribed burial rituals have not been enacted.[2] In Vietnam the 300 000 still missing 20 years after the war ended are considered wandering souls for the same reason. They have lost their place in the order of things, in the social and historical fabric. There are personal memories of them but no external evidence or sign to embody these memories. Who can show that these people once lived, had values and causes, and thus what their deaths mean?

The Somme veteran would understand the scenes of emotional catharsis evident daily along the black wall in Washington containing the names of the 58 000 soldiers from the United States who died in Vietnam. The wall was erected only belatedly; for a decade after the war ended veterans had to contend with a society that had disowned its own guilt and was blaming them instead. They wrestled alone with feelings of shame and betrayal and a sense of wasted sacrifice, theirs and their dead comrades'. To them the wall meant that the nation had finally owned up to the war and was publicly acknowledging what the American participants had

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Halabja 1988: "Truth is a very difficult concept." (British government testimony at Scott Enquiry into supplying arms to Iraq)

paid. Until then these American dead had also been wandering souls of a kind.

Terror of silence

There are 50 violent conflicts currently active in the world. In almost all of these, military and economic elites are at war with sectors of their own societies, typically the poor. Those with power to abuse are the enemies of memory and the voices that articulate them. Foucault wrote that the voice of the torture victim was a whisper; in many oppressive states even whispers are subversive. In Guatemala, where 150 000 mostly Indian peasants have been murdered by the military in the past 30 years, silence has been an essential survival mode.[3] To name the victims, and even to be related to them, was to be a subversive and therefore a target. The terror was such that one of my anthropologist colleagues has been told by widows that they had "forgotten" the names of their murdered husbands. In Argentina in the late 1970s a military regime

Juana Jiron Romero

"disappeared" several thousand people they saw as dissidents, and also 400 children. Few ever reappeared alive or dead, and when mothers and grandmothers began a weekly protest vigil in Buenos Aires the authorities dismissed them as *Las Locas* (The Madwomen). To date, an unfettered investigation into these events to establish the fate of each named person and at whose hands has not been permitted, even with the restoration of civilian government. When those in power refuse to own up to atrocious acts committed by agents in their name, they seem to be insisting that the "disappeared," which means the tortured and extrajudicially executed, are not victims but the guilty ones. The perpetrators keep their impunity, while the disappeared are left in social and political limbo and many of their families in what has been called frozen mourning.

Denying the past

History shows that there has generally been little redemption for those massively wronged and that accounts are seldom settled. So too in the modern era, when those in power have had the capacity to deny the undeniable. Though we think that only fascist cranks could deny the Jewish Holocaust, the first genocide of the 20th century—of up to 1·5 million Armenians by Turkey in 1915—is still officially totally denied. The United States has expressed not a word of regret for the death of 2-3 million civilians and the ecological devastation wreaked in Vietnam during 1964-75; until recently it continued to stigmatise the country and impede its reconstruction. The same can be said of (white) South Africa, whose undeclared wars against Mozambique and Angola in the 1980s have virtually destroyed them as viable nations. None the less, the question of societal validation and reparation for victims remains a resonant one, and almost universally the human costs are higher when this is denied. After the second world war Germany apologised to its victims (and has continued to do so) and made financial restitution. Japan, whose atrocities were on no lesser scale, largely failed to do either and, just as important, did not give an open account of its actions in history books used by its own schoolchildren. It is no surprise that British survivors of Japanese concentration camps, Korean women forced into sexual slavery for the Japanese army, and other groups are all still asserting that Japan has not acknowledged, let alone settled, the score. Until this happens there is no question of forgiving and forgetting, and they are angered by suggestions of Japanese participation at commemoration ceremonies marking the 50th anniversary of the war's ending.

Acknowledgment and reparation

It is vital to press that the victims of violent conflict and state terror, the dead and "disappeared," be named and acknowledged. This is not an exercise in simple humanitarianism. Restoring the dead to the social fabric of their times is important in connecting them to the causes of violent conflict, in measuring the total cost of the violence, and in mending the holes in the fabric that have resulted. It helps those left behind generate a meaning for events and a social context for their mourning. The dead are lost but they may be redeemed to the extent that their names and fates have a place on the public stage, their stories part of contemporary history, on whose scales they have weighed something.

This moves us on to the urgent questions that are then begged of the social order, local and international, and the values of the dominant institutions. Who willed these deaths, who carried them out, which social

sector benefited from them, directly or indirectly? Going further, we may observe with what implacability Western governments and businessmen tacitly insist that the alliances they choose with those with power in the Third World are shaped by their geopolitical and business interests, not by issues of human rights and social justice. People without power, even in their millions, are strategically unimportant and therefore ignorable. We may wonder further about the values of the world order when the major arms exporters are all members of the United Nations Security Council, with the United States and the United Kingdom first and second. The United Kingdom continued to sell arms to Saddam Hussein, whom it saw as a regional ally worth cosseting, even though he was known to be using poison gas on Kurdish towns. We could ponder whether Western leaders and businessmen have an ethical limit beyond which they would find that their dinner tasted funny, or that the sight of their children at play would evoke plaguing thoughts of their likely fate if they had been Kurdish or East Timorese or Salvadoran.

In Chile in the late 1980s a mass grave was located whose remains were eventually traced to 16 men abducted by security agents from a village in another part of the country in 1973, shortly after the coup (driven by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)) installed a military regime under General Pinochet. Amid their grief the 16 widows were immensely relieved that their husbands were no longer just in their personal memory but had reappeared. As the remains were being disinterred for reburial at home, one of the widows said, "They may be dust but they are loved dust." The discovery added to the clamour for a full investigation into the fate of around 2000 others who disappeared in the same period. In Nicaragua the mother of Liset Jiron Romero was similarly concerned to show that Liset was not her private delusion or hallucination, not a ghost, but had definitely lived—until she was murdered because United States foreign policy decreed a war in Nicaragua, whose hallmark was atrocity. The struggle is to get the social order to own up to what is done to reduce human beings to dust, albeit loved dust, and to the uncounted others who are not even that, merely names in the mouths of those who remember. This is a struggle without end but one that cannot be shirked.

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French Polynesia: a nuclear paradise in the Pacific

Hans Veeken

> The land is like our mother. People come from the land.
> We must always respect our mother, not explode bombs in her belly
> Our good way of life comes from the land.
> Destruction of land will lead to destruction of life.
>
> JACQUES IHORAI, president, Evangelical Church of French Polynesia

"The nuclear testing ruined the country," says a French doctor. We met on the docks of Tahiti, watching Greenpeace's ship, *Rainbow Warrior*, depart for the atoll of Mururoa. "Not only by contamination of the environment with nuclear fallout or leakage of the residue in the bottom of the atoll, but far more by disrupting the social harmony of the country," he continues. "The country was self sufficient before the testing started; people subsisted on farming and fishing. Nowadays the state is entirely dependent on France. Imports exceed exports tenfold; it is an artificial state: approximately 15% of the population work as civil servants. Migration, loss of cultural values, degradation of agriculture, change in eating habits, prostitution, alcoholism, and mental illnesses are all the result of this. This country is addicted to France. Since the moratorium on the testing, the people have been forced to think of a future without France. Resuming the testing is like giving an addict who recently stopped using drugs another shot. France has the obligation to leave behind a state that is self sufficient and not a wreck with a long term legacy of nuclear waste. I can show you files of patients who died of radiation, but I guess you are more interested in public health aspects. Well, the cancer register you might look for doesn't exist: not kept, or hidden, who knows? Anyway, inaccessible for us. Don't forget that until 1984 most practising doctors here were military people. It is no coincidence that the doctor supervising the atolls of Tuamotu, where the test site Mururoa is situated, is still a military doctor."

French Polynesia is an archipelago of about 130 islands, situated in the Pacific halfway between Australia and South America (map). The territory covers an area as big as Europe. Although its population is only 200 000, the country is well known to the world, mostly for its paradise-like scenery. The crew of the *Bounty* simply refused to sail on and settled on one of the islands. Who has not dreamt of retiring on a distant atoll, inhabited only by some friendly natives, subsisting on fish and coconuts? Jacques Chirac's announcement of the resumption of nuclear testing on the atolls of Mururoa and Fangataufa, in the extreme south east of the archipelago, has stirred not only the archipelago but also the world.

As an overseas territory, French Polynesia has an autonomous government, but it depends on France for defence, justice, finances, and foreign affairs. The islands of the archipelago have a volcanic origin. Tahiti, on which half the population lives, is the largest. The smaller islands are atolls: the volcano sank and coral was deposited on top. This coral is visible as a rim above sea level, surrounding the inner lagoon. After Algerian independence forced France to stop nuclear testing there, the French decided that the Pacific was the most suitable place to continue, conducting 44 atmospheric tests up to 1976. Thereafter they performed 110 underground tests, drilling boreholes 800 metres into the basalt of the volcano. It is presumed that the nuclear waste after the blast remains safe in the basalt and does not migrate into the environment. Ironically, Mururoa means place of the great secret in the local language.

A child without an anus

We decided to visit the country to assess the effects of the testing on the health of the population and to see whether this necessitated a humanitarian response.

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